



Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights

## Briefing on Children in Gaza, October 2013

This briefing is supplementary to the joint submission by Palestinian human rights NGOs<sup>1</sup> and the individual Israel-UPR submission by the Gaza-based Al Mezan Center for Human Rights.<sup>2</sup> This document is endorsed by Gaza Community for Mental Health Program; National Society for Rehabilitation, Gaza Strip; Culture and Free Thought Association, Gaza. It aims to focus on the situation of Palestinian children in the Gaza Strip under Israel's occupation, military activities and blockade.

Children in the Gaza Strip suffer from a wide range of violations of their most basic rights due to the abuse by Israel of its effective control of the Gaza Strip as well as Israel's frequent military operations in the Strip. Violations of international human rights and humanitarian law impact on; inter alia, the right to life, health, water, food, housing and education.

Respectable concerned States are kindly asked to raise these violations with Israel during the 2013 UPR; significantly focusing on:

1. Abolishing the blockade/closure of Gaza and ensure access to health, family, land, and education;
2. Strict respect of the full abidance by the rules of IHL during conflicts;
3. Effective access to mechanisms of redress and accountability; and
4. Full respect of the CRC.

### **The Right to Life and Body Integrity**

Over the past four years, Israel has failed to comply with its obligations to respect the right to life of Palestinian children living in the Gaza Strip, as is demonstrated by the high number of children killed by its forces during this period. Children make up the largest category of the victims of Israeli attacks on Gaza, including during Operation Cast Lead (2008-09) (OCL) and Operation Pillar of Defense (November 2013) (OPD). Al Mezan's documentation points out a significant proportion of children were killed in direct military attacks; including airstrikes on houses in densely populated areas.

- In the Gaza Strip alone, 388 Palestinian children were killed by the Israeli forces between 1 January 2009 and 30 December 2012. Thousands others were injured and at least 93 were arrested during the same period.
- 317 of these children were killed during OCL in 2009, and more than 1,600 were injured during the same period. Another 34 were killed and 446 were injured during OPD between 14 and 21 November 2012..
- 1,777 children lost one or both parents since 27 December 2008 until 18 January 2009.

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<sup>1</sup> Joint Report submitted on 16 July 2012 by the Palestinian Human Rights Organisations Council, available at [http://www.upr-info.org/IMG/pdf/js3\\_upr\\_isr\\_s15\\_2012\\_jointsubmission3\\_e.pdf](http://www.upr-info.org/IMG/pdf/js3_upr_isr_s15_2012_jointsubmission3_e.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Individual UPR submission, Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights, 30 September 2013, available at [http://www.mezan.org/en/details.php?id=17782&ddname=IOF&id2=7&id\\_dept=22&p=center](http://www.mezan.org/en/details.php?id=17782&ddname=IOF&id2=7&id_dept=22&p=center).



Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights

## Briefing on Children in Gaza, October 2013

- During OCL and OPD 49 boys and 30 girls of the injured children became permanently disabled, according to the National Society for Rehabilitation, Gaza Strip.
- The table below indicates the distribution of age groups of the above child fatalities.

Distribution of Child Fatalities in Gaza during the period (01.01.2009 and 31.12.2012)				
Total	Age			
	0 – 3	3 – 6	6 – 12	12 – 18
388	27	38	78	245

### Enforcement of Restricted Access Areas (Buffer Zones) in Gaza

Since after OCL, Israel has prohibited access to 17 per cent of Gaza's territory by enforcing a Buffer Zone (BZ) along its border with Gaza by force. The BZ extends up to 1.5km into Gaza. It slices 35 per cent of Gaza's agricultural land. The lives of children living inside or near the BZ are constantly in danger due to the use of excessive force to enforce the BZ; which resulted with dozens of children killings and injuries. Home demolitions in the BZ also caused waves of displacement from the area, drastically affecting children's welfare and safety.

- 17 children were killed by the Israeli forces in the BZ including; 2 children who were farming their land with their families. Another 103 others were injured including 6 while farming family land.
- Following OCL, few houses remained standing in the BZ; of which 27 were demolished during the same period, displacing 76 children.
- The Israeli naval forces, who enforce a BZ in Gaza sea by force, have killed, injured and arrested dozens of minors on board of Palestinian fishing boats.

### The Right to Education

The Israeli blockade of Gaza renders futile any efforts to maintain children's right to education. Israeli restrictions on imports prevent building new schools. Schools are unable to accommodate the increasing number of school children, which impacts on the quality of education. Most schools work on double shifts and have very high classroom density; reaching over 36 children per classroom.

At least, 139 school buildings are needed to end double shifts in the 76% of government schools and 86% of UNRWA schools. At the same time, Israeli attacks have targeted dozens of schools and/or caused disruption to schools located within or near the BZ.

- During the period 1 January 2009 to 31 December 2012, 302 education facilities, including schools, were destroyed or damaged by the Israeli forces.
- During OCL alone, the Israeli forces destroyed or damaged 158 education facilities (mostly schools).
- During OPD, Israeli forces destroyed or damaged 95 education facilities (mostly schools), halting schooling for eight days.



Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights

## Briefing on Children in Gaza, October 2013

- Another 49 education facilities, including schools, were destroyed or damaged by the Israeli forces between these two military operations.

### **The Right to Health**

Israel's six-year blockade of Gaza is the single greatest contributor to the endemic and long-lasting poverty, deterioration of healthcare, infant mortality, disease, chronic malnutrition and preventable deaths of children.<sup>3</sup> It puts children's right to health at a grave risk as access to health services and care inside Gaza is hampered by lack of equipment, expertise, and medicines, while access to care outside of Gaza is largely restricted by the movement restrictions. Basic health determinants, such as access to potable water, a functioning sanitation system, nutrition, and adequate housing, are also seriously hampered by Israeli restrictions.

The World Health Organization reported in 2013 that Palestinian patients depend on access to East Jerusalem's six non-profit Palestinian hospitals for specialized health services. Patients are referred for critical medical interventions, made more necessary as a result of the blockade of the Gaza Strip since 2007, and restrictions on movement of people and goods from Gaza and West Bank, including restrictions on physicians' access to continuing training....Obtaining a permit is complicated and difficult, and the uncertainty and last-minute nature of the Israeli response makes the process more stressful for patients and their families....Gaza patients can be called for security interviews before or during the crossing.... Delays and denials of access violate patients' right to access and may lead to a deterioration in their health status.<sup>4</sup>

A Gaza Community Mental Health Program report indicates that '98.7% of children reported that they were not safe at homes, 96.3% were not able to protect themselves, 96% were not able to protect their family members, and 94.4% said other people outside the family were not able to protect them'.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Letter by Defence Children International-Palestine, and the Palestinian Health Work Committees, available online at [http://www.dci-palestine.org/sites/default/files/dci\\_and\\_hwc\\_alicia\\_keys\\_letter\\_final.pdf](http://www.dci-palestine.org/sites/default/files/dci_and_hwc_alicia_keys_letter_final.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Right to health: Barriers to health access in the occupied Palestinian territory, 2011 and 2012, WHO Special Report, available at <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/WHO%20Report-%20Right%20to%20health%20-%20Barriers%20to%20health%20access%20in%20the%20oPt%20-%202012%20-%202013.pdf>; accessed 27 October 2013.

<sup>5</sup> 'Trauma, Grief, and PTSD in Palestinian children Victims of War on Gaza', Gaza Community Mental Health Program.